

Student Center

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Newhouse senior Michael Collazo entered the world of Internet news last February when he and his brother launched LATNN.com to cover the Latino community in the United States and abroad.

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—Michael Collazo '99

Covering Latino news on the web

The media were after Michael Collazo '99 last summer. He was just finishing up a photo shoot with the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and already moving on to another interview. He was neither stressed nor drained—in fact, he was excited and eager to stop a moment and talk about his groundbreaking project that had caught the media's attention. Collazo, a senior broadcast journalism major at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, is co-founder, with his 24-year-old brother Raphael, of the Internet web site LATNN.com, as well as editor-in-chief of *Grafico*, the site's monthly news magazine.

LATNN.com—which stands for Latino Online News Network (<http://www.LATNN.com>)—uses EFE, a Spain-based wire service, and local Latino publications from across the country to spread the word in English and Spanish about happenings in the Latino community in the United States and abroad. "I had been reading national and local African American publications, and wished a publication existed along these lines geared to the Latino audience," Collazo says. "So, instead of just saying I would love to create the medium, I decided to do it."

Collazo and his brother sat down in July 1997 and devised a plan, moving forward with the guidance of a family friend in the television business. Last February they launched LATNN.com and *Grafico* with a seven-member team. The core group works in Philadelphia, the technical staff in New York City, and the writers wherever they're located. They turned to the Internet because it was the least expensive medium and could reach a limitless audience. "By doing it this way, we can expand wider than we could on paper," he says. "I was also intrigued by the notion of having an international audience."

Originally a quarterly, *Grafico* became a monthly electronic publication in June. "Online magazines are usually not very successful because visitors hit the site once and don't come back until the next month or longer," Collazo says. "If we have people visit daily because of the news network, we don't want them to wait too long before they can read the next issue."

Collazo is interested in more than the latest Washington scandal or other mainstream media stories; he focuses the magazine on Latinos in the United States and Latin America, and addresses issues like U.S. immigration and Spain's role in the Latin American community. Collazo plans to enhance *Grafico* with regional coverage and reviews of Latino-authored works.

As with most entrepreneurial ventures, problems are inevitable, and the Collazo brothers have seen their share, such as not having enough people to execute their media plan. "It's been a struggle to find young, seasoned journalists to write about Latino issues," he says.

Financial constraints have been the biggest obstacle, however,

preventing them from adding animated graphics and sound to the web site. "At this point we don't have any character," Collazo says. "*Grafico* is only text, and I want us to move toward a more visually pleasing product." They also want to add stories from *The Associated Press* and *The New York Times* wire services, minute-by-minute and hourly news updates, and chat rooms to address Latino issues.

The Collazos also hope to land national advertisers for the site, start a classified section, link to other Latino sites, create an online radio show, and spin off an actual magazine. In addition, Collazo wants his technical staff to capitalize on the venture and offer web development services. "We want to be as big a news provider as possible—the authority on Latino news," he says.

Collazo hasn't committed to a time frame for these projects, focusing instead on wrapping up pending stories so he can concentrate on his senior year. "The only time I devote to this project now is late nights and weekends," he says. "I primarily want to be a student."

After graduation Collazo will move full steam ahead with the service and *Grafico*. "I don't want to go too fast for fear of losing consistency," he says. "We work with limited resources, so I want to make sure we are factually correct, cross every 't,' and dot every 'i.'" —NATALIE A. VALENTINE

Community building with a temple design

When a high school teacher asked Thongkhoun Pathana about his goals, Pathana answered without hesitation: "I want to become an architect and build a Buddhist temple." At the time, he didn't realize how prophetic that statement would be.

Pathana, now a fifth-year student in the School of Architecture, has not only designed his first Buddhist temple, he is also the project director and will oversee the building's construction. In addition, he is the youngest member of the board of directors of the Watlao Buddhovath of Rhode Island, the Buddhist community building the temple. The community, established in 1986, is located in Smithfield, Rhode Island; its congregation is composed of 6,000 Laotian Americans residing in the state. Pathana also directs the community's Sunday school and is intimately involved in developing new programs and services for Laotian youth through the community's Southeast Asian Cultural Center.

Along with juggling a full courseload at SU, the Dean's List student usually spends several hours a night tending to his temple responsibilities via telephone, e-mail, and fax. During semester breaks and summer vacations, he logs 16 hours a day, 7 days a week, working on Watlao Buddhovath projects.

For Pathana, the temple is simply a physical manifestation of his deeply held religious values and beliefs. In helping to build the temple he is also helping build a community steeped in the traditions and culture of his homeland. The temple serves as a gathering place where members regain their sense of cultural identity, family, and community values; learn leadership skills and self-confidence; and study the teachings of Buddha. "In Laotian society, family and com-



School of Architecture student Thongkhoun Pathana designed a Buddhist temple for the Watlao Buddhovath of Rhode Island community and is directing plans for the temple's construction. Pathana is a member of the community's board of directors and is dedicated to preserving Laotian culture.

munity values are very important," Pathana says. "To understand the needs of a community, you need to understand its social and cultural condition."

Pathana sees a strong analogy between his work in the Buddhist community and his architectural studies. Architecture is more than designing buildings, he says. Architects must understand their clients' needs and the role of the structure in their lives. Architects also follow a code of ethics and professional conduct, which outlines their duty and obligation to serve clients and design safe structures. "My studies at SU have taught me the art and history of architecture," Pathana says. "I have learned how to interpret architecture and how to design something meaningful using theories, ideas, and metaphors."

Pathana's odyssey began in 1995 when he spent the summer as a volunteer assistant to the Venerable Bounthanh Prasavath, the master monk at Watlao Buddhovath. When the monk asked him about his college education, Pathana told him he studied architecture and explained what architects do in this country. "He then told me to design and plan a Buddhist temple that represents traditional Buddhist architecture," Pathana says.

Working closely with the master monk, Pathana completed the preliminary drawings that summer. The temple project got off to a rather bumpy start when a fire destroyed the community's Sunday school building that fall. Replacing the building became a priority. "We could not have accomplished our goals without teamwork," Pathana says.

As the Sunday school building nears completion, planning for the temple continues. Temple construction is scheduled to begin in 2000.

Pathana's dedication and commitment have not gone unnoticed. After he graduates from SU in the spring, he plans to work on designing and building Buddhist temples for communities in St. Julienne, Canada; Louisiana; and Rochester, New York. "It is honorable to give something to the community," he says.

—JUDY HOLMES